

Improvisation

- the word sounds as if one has unfortunately left one's music at home. I would so much rather call it, or at least think of it, as "Creative activity". My aim in writing this article is to try to offer help and encouragement to anyone who feels "O, I wish I could do it" but has never made a serious attempt with any success.

Here is an exercise, to be played on the black notes only, slowly, deliberately, but with an inner intensity of co-operation with the 'argument' of the melody created by your fingers:



When you have mastered the technical problems you will begin to find yourself "looking forward" to the next phrase as you finish each one. You must try to feel that there is an enormous significance in what you are listening to, ^{eg. that} you are ~~indeed~~ exploring the joys and sorrows of your childhood as you learnt to walk and talk, - ^{the inner certainty,} the anxious question, the incommunicable aspiration, the joy of achievement (this is your right hand's activity) your left hand then lays all this into the grave of your being and makes it all your own for life.

Over →

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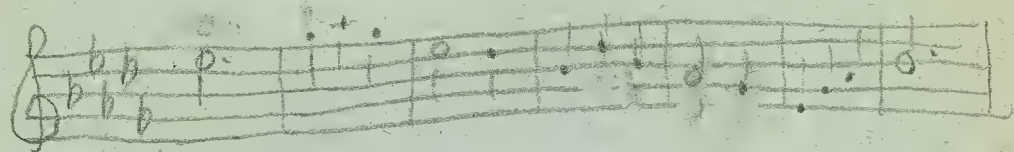
Notice that each hand has followed the same pattern of "1 2 3 4 5-4 3" throughout the whole exercise.

Now this is all useless if it has not aroused your interest; if you cannot become absorbed in it. You must hear in advance what you are going to sing with your fingers. You must make a habit of never playing without what can only be called reverence and the same kind of care that you would exercise when eg "washing up" a valuable porcelain tea-set. Listen to what you are putting forth into the realms of space and time.

A musical child, travelling in a noisy clattering train, can isolate from the cacophony a pure and lovely stream of melody sung by an imagined choir of angels. So must you feel that you are selecting the sequence of tones your fingers are producing, from the cacophony that would occur if all the notes of the piano were played simultaneously.

The next exercise I suggest is that you press down the right-hand-side pedal with your right toe. Keep it down while you improvise with one finger, using black notes only. Here is a simple example of such an improvisation

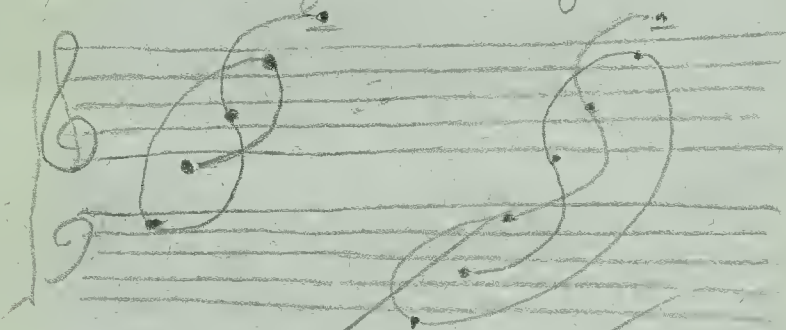
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These tunes ^{are in} what is known to musicians
as the pentatonic scale, the five tone scale.
This is the only scale which the black notes
can play. Five tones in each octave.

It's harder (and therefore useful) to play this exercise on the white notes (DEGABAG etc) being careful not to lose the feeling in the activity of the will. Each tone should speak to you, as before.

Now we must go deeper - we must find out how these five tones originate.



As you will notice in the middle one of this sequence of five notes at the interval of a fifth. Below G you plunge down to C and F. Above B you find the five "black notes" which provided you with that first exercise

The next step we take is foreshadowed
in the miracle (or sign) of the Feeding of the
Five Thousand

